

Guillain-Barré Syndrome

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS)

Source

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS). [Guillain-Barré Syndrome Information Page](#).

Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) is a rare neurological disorder in which the body's immune system attacks part of the peripheral nervous system. It is one of several disorders involving weakness due to peripheral nerve damage caused by the person's immune system. Initial symptoms include unexplained sensations such as tingling in the feet or hands, or pain, followed by weakness on both sides of the body. The weakness can increase in intensity over a period of hours to days to weeks until the muscles cannot be used at all and the person is almost totally paralyzed. If breathing muscles are affected, the person is often put on a ventilator. Most individuals, however, have good recovery from even the most severe cases of GBS, although some continue to have some degree of weakness.

The exact cause of Guillain-Barré syndrome is unknown. It can occur a few days or weeks after the person has had symptoms of a respiratory or gastrointestinal viral infection. Occasionally, surgery will trigger the syndrome. In rare instances, vaccinations may increase the risk of GBS. Recently, some countries worldwide have reported an increased incidence of GBS following infection with the Zika virus.

A nerve conduction velocity (NCV) test, which measures the nerve's ability to send a signal, can aid the diagnosis. The cerebrospinal fluid that bathes the spinal cord and brain contains more protein than usual in someone with GBS, so a physician may decide to perform a spinal tap to obtain a sample of fluid to analyze.